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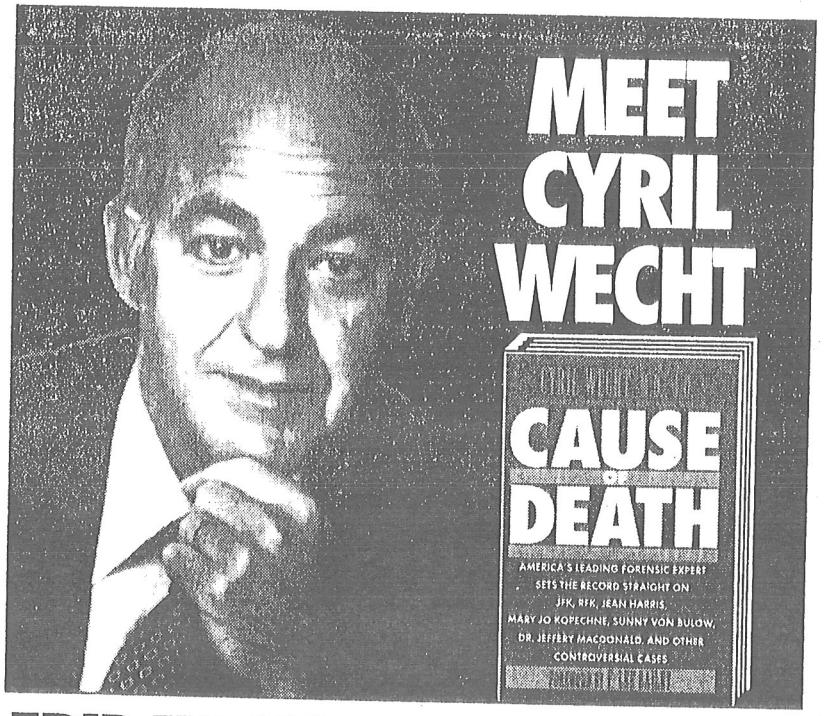
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AMERICA'S LEADING FORENSIC EXPERT
SETS THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON
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S.F. CHRONICLE REVIEW - 11/28/93

LETTERS TO REVIEW

What Ailed JFK?

Editor: Unfortunately, most writers and reviewers of history have little knowledge of pharmacology, pathology or physiology. The medical report on John F. Kennedy is almost completely inaccurate (Richard Reeves' "President Kennedy," reviewed by Daniel L. Wick on October 24).

He did not have Addison's disease. Apparently by 1945 he was having back pain from assorted injuries. Cortisone did become available in 1947, when the cover of Life magazine showed a severe arthritic dancing joyfully after treatment with cortisone. At this time the dangerous side effects of long-term use were not known. One effect is suppression of the function of normal adrenal glands. This might be termed doctor-induced (iatrogenic) Addisonian effect. True Addison's disease is loss of adrenocortico function usually from trauma or tumor.

There are many bad complications from overprescribing cortisone. I have never read or heard that it caused, as the review mentioned, an enhanced sense of confidence, personal power or sexual desire.

Also, "persistent venereal disease" is not a meaningful medical diagnosis. Neither are "frequent, mysterious, recurrent high fevers," except in older novels.

James W. Kasch, M.D.
Oakland